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Director of Central Intelligence

Secret

25X1

Colombia: Challenges to Democratic Government

25X1

National Intelligence Estimate

Key Judgments

These Key Judgments represent the views of the Director of Central Intelligence with the advice and assistance of the US Intelligence Community.

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November 1989
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The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of these Key Judgments:

The Central Intelligence Agency
The Defense Intelligence Agency
The National Security Agency
Bureau of Intelligence and Research,
Department of State

also participating:

The Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence,
Department of the Army
The Director of Naval Intelligence,
Department of the Navy
The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence,
Department of the Air Force

The National Foreign Intelligence Board concurs.

The full text of this Estimate is being published separately with regular distribution.

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Colombia: Challenges to Democratic Government

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- *Colombia faces severe challenges—but no country in Latin America possesses greater capabilities to combat them:*
  - *The economy will grow at 3 percent plus into 1991.*
  - *The armed forces' increasingly favorable force ratio and growing aggressiveness should allow some inroads against guerrilla forces.*

25X1

- *Drug-related violence—some possibly directed at US targets—will continue at high levels:*
  - *But President Barco is almost certain to stay the course, and his most probable successors are likely to support his tough antinarcotic and security policies.*
  - *Boosted US aid levels and US initiatives against narcotics problems at home will be important considerations for Barco's successor, however.*

25X1

- *Even if Colombia maintains its counterdrug effort over the next year, it will have only a passing effect on US drug supplies; a reduction in world demand is necessary to carve back the cocaine industry.*

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- *There is a 30-percent chance that a confluence of misfortunes or negative trends in the economy and public fatigue with the antinarcotics campaign could spur Colombia toward accommodation with traffickers.*

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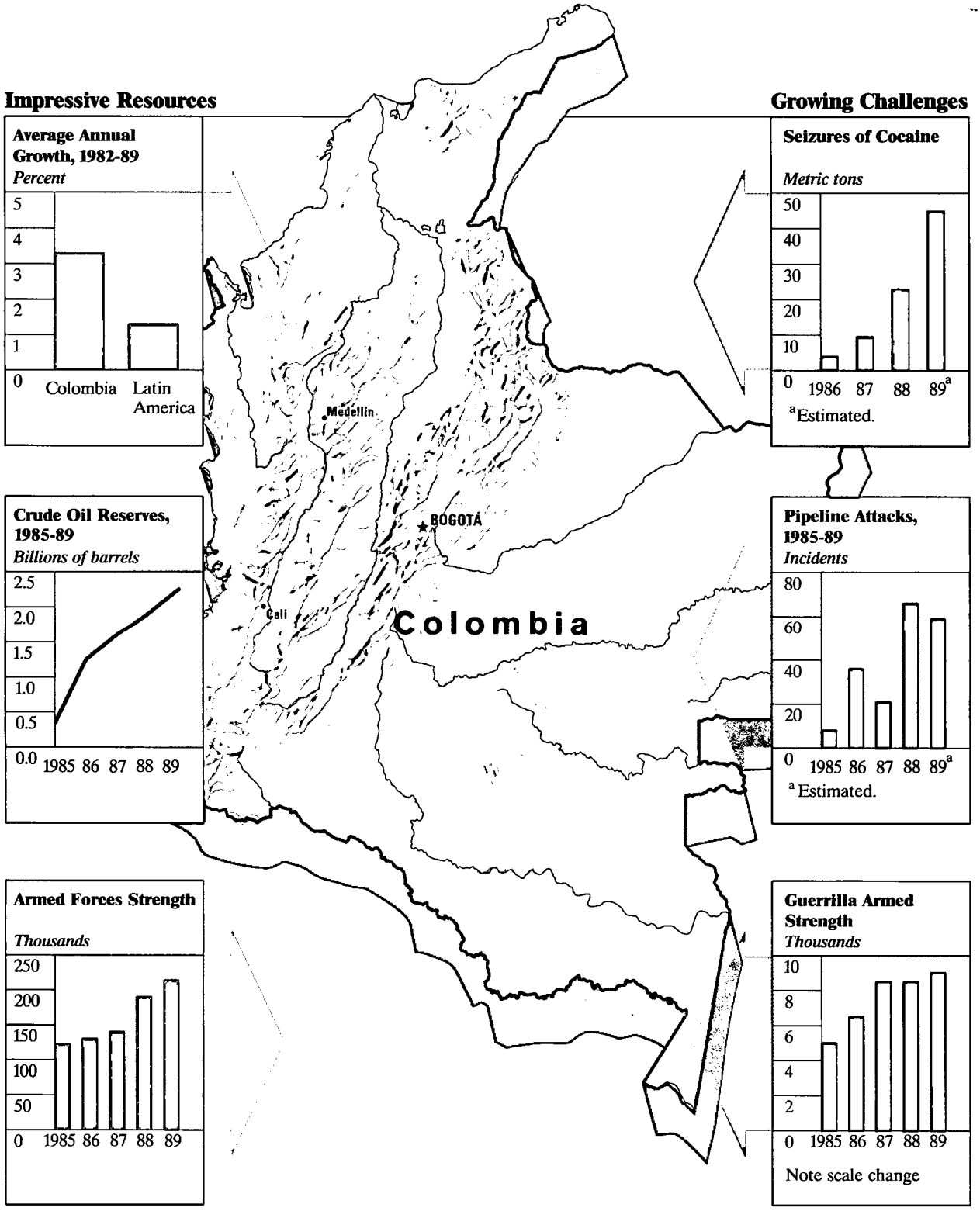

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Key Judgments

Colombia today is a paradox. With one of strongest economies in the region and one of the most enduring traditions of democratic government, it is beset by a level of political violence, guerrilla warfare, and drug-related corruption and murder that are fraying the fabric of constitutional government. No other country in Latin America faces more severe challenges—or possesses a greater capability to combat them.

The economy will continue to be a strength. We expect it to grow at about 3 percent plus through 1990 and into 1991. Colombia's clearly improved counterinsurgency capability is a second plus. Colombia's guerrilla groups, totaling about 9,000 combatants, will be able to sustain a serious level of violence, especially against economic targets. But they are unlikely to unify and are being hunted by both civilian paramilitary forces and a strengthened military. The government's increasingly favorable force ratio, its talk-fight strategy, and growing confidence and aggressiveness should allow it to manage the threat and make inroads into insurgent strength in some areas.

The greatest threat to the stability and integrity of the political system over the next two years will stem from the narcotrafficking groups. Compared with the guerrillas, traffickers will be better equipped, have superior intelligence networks, have greater influence in urban areas, and be more ruthless. Their threat extends beyond violence and intimidation—their rapidly increasing rural real estate holdings, for example, will be a major impediment to the government's land reform program.

Drug-related violence—including terrorism against the government, civilian and business sectors, and trafficker-financed rightwing assassinations of leftists—will be a potent destabilizing force. The overlap and interrelationships between trafficker organizations and local rightist paramilitary groups will sustain very high levels of political violence. This situation is likely to be exacerbated by the inclination of some military and police officials to condone and even support paramilitary violence against the left.

Taken together, these problems will challenge the effectiveness of Colombian democracy and the economic system, but not their viability. The drug lords will make more energetic attempts to manipulate and infiltrate the two major parties, but will be hindered by the conservatism of the system and popular rejection of trafficker violence. More dramatic violence against key government figures would probably serve to further galvanize support for harsh measures against the traffickers.

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President Barco is almost certain to stay the course and his most probable successors in August 1990 are more likely to pursue his tough security policies than to reverse them. They also would maintain conservative probusiness programs that are key to investment and continued, if somewhat slowing, growth.

The residual strengths of the Colombian state make it a prospective strong partner for the United States in helping to combat the drug problem and to continue to anchor democratic rule in Latin America, but the magnitude of its problems will make it more reliant on foreign aid. Government tactical progress against the insurgents will begin to be undercut by the logistic strains of sustained armed forces participation in antidrug operations by mid-1990 unless offset by increases in external assistance. In short, if the military is to sustain both a counterinsurgency and antinarcotics effort at current levels or beyond, higher levels of external support will be necessary. In addition to boosted US aid levels, demonstrated US initiatives in the narcotics battle at home—stiffened penalties, actions to counter US drug money laundering, and efforts to reduce domestic drug consumption—will be important considerations for Barco's successor in choosing his drug policies.

Even then, the antidrug campaign is not likely to have a major impact on the US drug market. If Colombia maintains its present level of effort over the next year and beyond—and there is a good chance it will—it will have the potential to disrupt the Colombian trade by causing traffickers to reconfigure and relocate some operations, forcing cutbacks in processing and exports. Nevertheless, the drug industry is extremely resilient, and for the campaign to have much more than a passing effect on drug supplies in the United States over the next year or two would require efforts of similar magnitude in other Latin American countries. Lacking this, successes in Colombia paradoxically will prompt drug traffickers in other countries, including those outside the Andes, to take up the slack. Permanently reducing the size of the cocaine industry will require a reduction in worldwide demand.

One price of the antidrug campaign in Colombia for the United States will be the terrorist risk to US facilities and personnel. These are important, if secondary targets of insurgent and trafficker violence, and they will be in higher profile as new US assistance comes into play and if drug kingpins are extradited. Attacks on the Embassy and attempted kidnappings of senior US officials will be well within the range of options considered by the traffickers and, to a lesser extent, the insurgents. Strikes at other US targets in Latin America, Western Europe, and even inside the United States are within the narcotraffickers' capabilities.

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While on balance we judge that Colombia can cope with the significant threats it confronts and stands a good chance of making progress in some areas, there is perhaps a 10-percent chance that a confluence of misfortunes—a large-scale offensive by insurgents aggravated by trafficker terrorism beyond even current levels and against the backdrop of an economic recession—could lead to a downward spiral of insecurity and violence. Regardless of the level of external support, such a situation would probably breed near chaotic conditions and exhaust Bogota's financial resources.

There is a somewhat greater chance, perhaps 20 percent, that less dramatic but persistent negative trends in the economy and public fatigue with the antinarcotics campaign would spur a successor government in 1990 toward greater accommodation with the traffickers. This could seriously strain relations between Washington and Bogota.

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